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ABSTRACT

Junior college students on academic probation are as heterogeneous as the college population itself. They range from high-ability students dismissed from 4-year institutions to those with severe visual-motor handicaps. The differences should be more carefully identified so that appropriate help can be made available. Special counseling (required by California law for junior college probation students) must be given so that they can make realistic educational and vocational plans. The single 15-minute interview or the 50-minute group session required by one college does not provide such an opportunity. Changes in penalty grading and probation practices have shown favorable results. Not only do they reduce the number of students on academic probation, but they also switch the college emphasis from punishing inappropriate behavior to rewarding the appropriate. Fears that less punitive grading practices would lead to student irresponsibility have so far proved unfounded. Research on limited study loads, required periods of non-attendance, and other common restrictive sanctions of probation has not shown them to be effective in increasing success among probationary students. The open-door college has an obligation to all students, but especially to those on probation. For the below-average student, the junior college truly represents his last educational opportunity. (HH)

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JUNIOR COLLEGE STUDENTS ON ACADEMIC PROBATION

Students responding to the open-door colleges' universal invitation to a post-secondary education often find, by the end of their first semester of college work, that below-average academic performance has resulted in their assignment to probationary status—a warning that they will no longer be welcome unless they begin to meet institutional standards. As one author has quipped, the junior college philosophy "promises the healing fruits of education to 'Everyman,' but the probation policy carries the hooker that 'Everyman' has to be above average in the digestion of this fruit, or be in jeopardy of being driven from the garden" (ED 011 201).

The reasons students are assigned probationary status, the restrictions placed on them once assigned, some of their characteristics, their subsequent success and failure, and some attempts to help them succeed are the subjects of this issue of the *Junior College Research Review*. The search for relevant documents was limited to the collection of the ERIC Clearinghouse for Junior Colleges. Documents cited in the bibliography are available from the ERIC Document Reproduction Service as explained on page four, and additional documents concerning academic probation may be located in ERIC's official abstract journal, *Research in Education*.

Reasons for Probationary Status

A student may be assigned probationary status for various reasons. The most common is the failure to maintain an overall grade point average (GPA) of 2.0 (C), or better, in all college work (ED 019 944, ED 024 375, ED 024 376). If he has not graduated from high school or has received low marks there (ED 016 446, ED 023 381), has low scores on the School and College Ability Test (SCAT) (ED 014 274, ED 023 381), transfers from another 2- or 4-year college where he has been dismissed for academic reasons (disqualified) or been placed on probation (ED 013 601, ED 015 735, ED 024 375), or is readmitted after having been previously disqualified (ED 024 375), he may be assigned probationary or some other provisional status. Considering the typically unselected population at the junior college, the practice of grading to "transfer" standards, and the cumulative effect of grades below the C level on GPA's, it is estimated that more than 40 per cent of all junior college students are on academic probation sometime during their college career (ED 011 201).

Consequences of Probation

Once a student has been assigned probationary status, he may find a variety of restrictions placed on his academic pursuits. A limited number of units (ED 010 734, ED 013 601, ED 024 376), a required series of remedial courses (ED 014 274, ED 024 376), a program limited to evening and/or vocational courses only (ED 010 734, ED 016 446), or a required change of major (ED 024 376) are some of the more common restrictions. Many colleges require such a student to seek academic and vocational counseling while on probation in the hope that this special attention will uncover the problems responsible for his poor performance (ED 019 944, ED 024 376, ED 029 634).

Characteristics of Probationers

The student on probation tends to select a liberal arts program and is usually planning to transfer to a 4-year college despite a typically inadequate college preparation in high school and a need for remedial study, especially in English and mathematics (ED 026 064). Often he has transferred from another 2- or 4-year college where he had been either placed on probation or disqualified, or is being provisionally readmitted to the same junior college from which he had been previously disqualified (ED 013 601, ED 015 735, ED 029 634).

At Los Angeles City College (California), probationary students enrolled in personal adjustment psychology classes were studied in an attempt to identify factors that could account for their poor performance in school. They were found to have below-average verbal, but average nonverbal, I.Q. scores, and to have an average maturational age approximately one-half their chronological age. More than half these students were either left-handed or showed mixed dominance, and nearly every one exhibited some major eyesight or vision problem, with 25 per cent needing

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corrective lenses. In addition, impulsiveness, depression, and immaturity of self-concept were reflected by the House-Tree-Person Drawing Test, and their reading scores averaged below the 20th percentile on the Science Research Associates Reading for Understanding Test (ED 015 716).

Responding to an attitude measure, an earlier group of entering probationers at Los Angeles City College tended to view college from a vocational, rather than an academic, orientation. Although they indicated that an ideal college student would possess highly developed academic skills and interests, they saw no need to develop such skills and interests themselves. The members of this group who were later removed from probation seemed to possess greater self-ideal congruence and have both higher educational aspirations and higher SCAT scores than those who were continued on probation or disqualified (ED 014 274).

Characteristics of Successful Probationers

Some probationary students appear to achieve greater academic success than others—both in terms of removing themselves from probation and by later graduating from junior college or transferring to a 4-year institution.

At Florissant Valley College (Missouri), successful probationers, besides having ranked higher in their high school graduating class and having earned higher SCAT scores, were absent less frequently, were almost one year older, and carried fewer units than those who were unsuccessful (ED 023 381).

At Los Angeles City College, students readmitted on probation because of disqualification from LACC or some other college were more successful than entering freshmen. Their chances of success were greater if they had completed 21 or more units of college work and had been disqualified from a 4-year rather than a 2-year college. The performance of students who had stayed out of school for a semester or more did not differ from those who had not (ED 010 734).

A statewide study of university and state college students admitted to California junior colleges after disqualification from their senior institutions found them to be largely successful, either graduating from junior college or transferring back to a 4-year school. It was reasoned that emotional immaturity, rather than low ability, was responsible for their original disqualification (ED 015 735).

At El Camino College (California), 70 per cent of the students admitted on probation from 4-year colleges and universities in California eventually graduated or transferred to senior institutions, as opposed to only 33 per cent of the junior college probationers. From the findings of this study, it was concluded that neither a waiting period between disqualification and readmission, nor a restricted number of units each semester on probation contributed to a student's ultimate success (ED 013 601).

Treatment of Probationers

Research on probationary students has indicated little or no relationship between the severity of restrictive probationary regulations and student motivation or success (ED 013 601). Studies of the effects of such sanctions as limited study loads and required periods of nonattendance are inconclusive at best (ED 010 734, ED 013 601). As a result, changes in the penalty (D and F) grading practices and special counseling or training for probationary students have been tried in an attempt to make probation meaningful, not a mere impersonal warning.

Shasta College (California) experimented with penalty grading and probation practices by instituting a policy that allowed students to withdraw from class without penalty any time up to the final examination. Concern that students would sign up in large numbers for classes they had no intention of finishing, and would abuse the new policy by withdrawing even though they were capable of C work did not prove valid, as the increase in withdrawal grades did not exceed a corresponding decrease in penalty grades. As a result, fewer students earned grade point averages below 2.0; thus fewer students were assigned probationary status. Instructors seemed satisfied with the new policy and several indicated that their grading more accurately reflected student accomplishment, since they no longer felt compelled to carry a weak student with a passing grade he had not earned (ED 024 376).

At Santa Fe Junior College (Florida), a similar grading policy has been established for the general education courses common to all programs. In these courses, students earn a grade of A, B, C, or X. An X means that the student has not earned an A, B, or C and will need to do so before graduation (ED 030 424).

Students on probation at Glendale College (California), who attended an experimental series of group sessions designed to provide support and insight into their academic problems, subsequently earned significantly higher grade point averages than a comparison group matched by age, sex, number of units taken, marital status of parents, type of program (academic or vocational), and entrance test scores. Students in the experimental group were observed to improve in appearance and dress, begin joining clubs, increase dating, and obtain part-time work. In some cases, parents informed the college of improved family relationships (ED 014 955).

At Los Angeles City College, the students with the visual-motor dysfunctions mentioned earlier in this review received intensive visual training and postural remediation, resulting in a marked improvement of their visual-motor integration. A need for further research to determine the effect of this improvement on their subsequent academic achievement is indicated (ED 015 716).

Summary

Junior college students on academic probation are no less heterogeneous than the junior college population itself. They range from high-ability students dismissed from 4-year colleges and universities to students with severe visual-motor handicaps. These differences need to be more carefully identified so that appropriate help can be made available.

Special counseling, as required by law for all California junior college students on probation, must be made available so that students can make in-depth, realistic educational and vocational plans. The single 15-minute interview or 50-minute group session reported by one college (ED 019 944) does not provide such an opportunity.

Changes in penalty grading and probation practices are reported to have favorable results. Not only do such changes reduce the number of students on academic probation, but they also switch the college's emphasis from punishing inappropriate behavior to rewarding appropriate behavior. Fears that less punitive grading practices would lead to student irresponsibility have not been warranted thus far, and research on limited study loads, required periods of nonattendance, and other common restrictive sanctions of probation has not shown them to be effective in increasing success among probationary students.

The open-door college has a special obligation to "Everyman," especially if "Everyman" is on probation. For the below-average student, the junior college's open door truly represents the last educational opportunity he will have.

Michael R. Copper

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A companion volume to *RIE* is *Current Index to Journals in Education (CIJE)*, an announcement service that catalogs and indexes journal and periodical literature in the field of education. More than 200 educational journals are included. *CIJE* may be ordered from CCM Information Sciences, Inc., 866 Third Avenue, New York, New York 10022 for $3.50 per single copy or $34.00 for an annual subscription of 12 issues.

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